

Healthcare assistants (HCAs) do not receive any mandatory training in ethical theory. Here we explore the four most prominent ethical theories in healthcare ethics that inform peoples' actions and beliefs (whether they are aware of it or not), from everyday moral decisions to more abstract ethical dilemmas: utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics and principlism. This has the potential to result in poor ethical decision-making, and be an obstacle to understanding and appreciating the diversity of moral views between patients and colleagues. Utilitarianism Utilitarianism is a widely adopted moral theory that is the best-known example of consequentialism, a class of moral theories that are solely concerned about the consequences of our actions—whether they bring about the desired results. Ethical theory can be difficult to understand because it can appear abstract and irrelevant to everyday practice; but it need not be. An easy way to think of ethical theory is to see it simply as the attempt to identify and classify moral standards or rules that should, or do, guide our behaviour (Hendricks, 2004). In effect, the end justifies the means.